

# LOADSTAR LETTER #16

October 1994 Companion newsletter for LOADSTAR #126

"Real News! We Speak Commodore!"

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## My Kingdom For A Notch

LS 261094 Fender Tucker. Some of you may have received your latest LOADSTAR on disks that are notched only for the front side. What does this mean? How do you handle it? Why are we doing it? And what does the future bring?

**WHAT IT MEANS.** As far as you're concerned, the lack of a notch for the back side of a disk (the left side as you look at Side One or Three) means that any program on Sides Two or Four that writes to the disk will not be able to do it. It may give a "write protect on" message, "a file exists" message, or it may just crash.

**HOW TO HANDLE.** If you copy programs from LOADSTAR to other disks -- as we have always recommended -- before using them, you don't have to do a thing. The disk you copy them to will be notched and the programs will run just fine.

But if you insist on using the LOADSTAR disk itself to run programs from, the easy way to get around the problem is to notch the disk yourself. Here's how:

Using scissors, a knife, a disk notcher or any kind of hand punch, make a notch on the left side of the disk directly across from the other notch on the right side. The shape of the notch is not critical, but the position is relatively important. The notches look to me to be right at 1 inch from the top of the disk. Don't cut too far into the disk. 1/8 inch is about right; 1/4 inch is probably okay, but is getting close to the mylar "disk" inside the sleeve.

Your disk drive has a light source on one side of where the disk goes and a light sensor on the other. If there's a notch and the light sensor is triggered, then the disk can be written to. If it gets no light, then the disk is write-protected. This is why the position is fairly critical, but the shape of the notch is not. It may not look nice to have a round notch, as made by a typical hole punch, but it will definitely work.

**NOTE:** LOADSTAR's new Presenter allows you to set your color preferences and save them to disk, so if you want to do this, you'll need to notch both disks. Of course, as recommended, you can make a full-disk copy of LOADSTAR and leave the original disks the way they are. We've published some good full-disk copiers: STAR NIBBLER on LS #54 and L-COPY 1

and 2 on LS #105.

**WHY WE'RE DOING IT.** Jeff Jones mentioned a few issues back about Softdisk's problems in finding double-notch, double-index hole disks. Since then, we've pretty much given up on finding double-index hole disks. Our ALF mass copiers require an index hole on both sides so we have resigned ourselves to copying LOADSTAR on our new Rimage copiers. They're better than the ALFs, require less manpower, and have no requirements at all (notch or index hole), but it was handy for our Copying Department to have a second way of copying when the Rimage copiers are busy with Softdisk's other products.

Now we're having trouble finding double-notch disks. Companies that used to supply them by the thousands are now making only the one-notch disks. There are companies that will notch the disks for several cents per disk, but the fact that we send out over 7000 per month for LOADSTAR alone makes this an expensive step.

**THE FUTURE OF DISKS.** There are so many 5.25 inch disks in existence that I don't foresee a time when you can't buy a box of ten or twenty via mail order -- at least for the next five years. But companies like Softdisk that need thousands per month are feeling the crunch already. Now that the high end machines (IBM and Mac) no longer use 5.25 inch disks the situation for us is going to get worse.

At this time we are passing the problem on to you (in a sense) by asking you to notch the disks yourself. It's easy enough to do and I doubt if any subscriber is going to complain too much about it.

But what if the worst case scenario happens? What if the supply of all 5.25 inch disks completely dries up because dieHard Commodoreans are the only computerists who still use 5.25 inch drives? Well, we'll still have the 3.5 inch version of LOADSTAR. The 3.5 inch format is not only going strong in the IBM/Mac world, it's doing quite well in the Commodore world because of Creative Micro Designs' FD series of drives. These are brand new, state-of-the-art drives that cost around \$200 and are available now. They'll probably still be available five years from now.

So the disk of the future is the 3.5 inch disk. If you can't afford an FD drive, don't worry, we'll continue to send you LOADSTARs on 5.25 inch disks for many years to come. But we rejoice every time someone takes advantage of our FD/LOADSTAR Combo offer, because now we have one more customer who can enjoy LOADSTAR without disk flipping, notching or waiting for a 1541 slow load. (See the ad in this newsletter for the FD/LOADSTAR Combo offer.)

By the way, if you're waiting for the C-64/128 to support CD drives, you'll probably have a long wait. CDs only make sense when filled with huge graphics files and the 8-bit CPU the C-64/128 is based upon simply can't handle graphics files larger than 64K...and probably never will.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

*(1) Copy LOADSTAR to a double-notched disk and keep the original LS as a backup.*

*(2) If you really, really want to use the original LS disk, notch the back side of LS disks yourself.*

*(3) Drop hints about the nifty FD/LOADSTAR Combo to appropriate relatives or friends before Christmas or your birthday.*

Finally, a little anecdote. Last week it was time to copy 1000 LOADSTAR 128s. We didn't have any double-notch disks so C.E. Prince, our master copyist, asked if there was any reason why they couldn't go out without a notch for the back side. Since there was a program on Side Two that wrote a high scores file to the disk, and the program was one of mine (WORDSMITH), I told C.E. that I thought it would be best if we could notch the disks ourselves. Armed with a Suncom disk notcher each, C.E. and I had a race to see who could notch 500 disks first. I won, but when C.E. and I

celebrated the feat by having a friendly thumb-wrestling contest, he beat me soundly.

Notching can be done by hand, and if you're doing just a few, it's perfectly painless, but DO NOT try notching 500 disks at a time! Your thumb will swell to twice its former size and if you dare to thumb-wrestle with someone else who's just notched 500 disks, you may lose.

Software Support International (1-800-356-1179) has plenty of notchers for \$6.95 + \$5.50 shipping and handling. These make a neat, rectangular notch at exactly the right spot on the disk.

Jeff's Two Cents: Methinks Fender doth worry too much. Almost everyone reading this has purchased software on unnotched disks. I personally ask you not to mutilate your disks unless you have a real notcher, and even then please don't use your original LOADSTAR disk if you're going to create files anyway. If you find that you can't write to your original LOADSTAR disk, (which you shouldn't do anyway), please use the *Copy It* feature, which we provide, to make a disk just for that program.

## Product News

Cardstar and Gamestar are now available from Softdisk on one 1581 disk at a reduced price. geoPowertools and Songsmith are also available on 1581 disks complete with our back issue catalog. Because there were only 900 blocks free on the 3.5 inch version of Cardstar/Gamestar, there is no back issue catalog on the same disk.

## Excerpts From Jim Brain's C-64/128 FAQ File

A FAQ is a frequently asked question. FAQ files exist for a number of topics, and we plan on publishing the entire FAQ file on disk in the near future. The FAQ

file contains tons of information that Commodore never told you. Here's just a taste of the wealth of knowledge available.

**3.4. What is the economic status of Commodore?** On April 29, 1994, Commodore International announced that it had been unable to renegotiate terms of outstanding loans and were closing down the business. In the days following, numerous rumors as to what the somewhat tersely worded statement meant have circulated. Although the following information was relayed from Gilles Bourdin, who talked at length with in-command folks at Commodore Germany, that does not prove the correctness of the following.

Commodore US has been slated for liquidation. However, according to Gilles Bourdin, calls to Commodore Germany determined that this will not impact the European operations. Commodore US, France, Spain, and Belgium were liquidated for various reasons (non-rentable subsidiary, no chance for profit, etc). The name Commodore and Amiga will be maintained after the liquidation, and Commodore has found an outside investor, although the terms of the investment have not been disclosed. Bourdin went on to say in a later note that Alwin Stumpf of Commodore Germany and top managers know the name of the investor, but no official word yet.

**4.1. How many Commodore machines are there?** I am glad you asked! I have compiled a list of all known Commodore computers and peripherals, including the CBM PC Clones and the Amigas, which is much too large to put in this FAQ. You can get it by e-mailing brain@msn.com with the Subject: line of "Commodore Products List", or look for the file called cbmmodel.txt in the same directories as the FAQ is kept.

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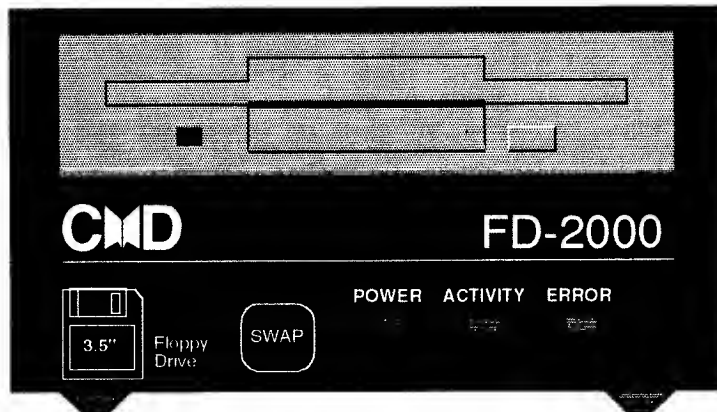
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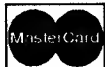
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### THE UNDERGROUND

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**12.1. What do I do for my ill disk drive?** If your drive won't even accept input from the computer, and the drive light is making some blinking pattern, then the drive may be telling you what is wrong.

No Blink Kernal (E000-FFFF)  
ROM or 6522 VIA Failure

One Blink: 6116 RAM Failure

Two Blinks: Possible Zero Page RAM Failure

Three Blinks: DOS (C000-CFFF) ROM Failure

Four Blinks: DOS (C000-CFFF) ROM Failure

Five Blinks: 6116 RAM Failure

Six Blinks: 6116 RAM Failure

Seven Blinks: 6116 RAM Failure

Eight Blinks: 6116 RAM Failure

**1541 Disk Drive:** The most common problem facing the 1541 disk drive is alignment. If your 1541 has trouble reading commercial disks, or reading disks written some time ago, but has less trouble reading recently written disks, chances are that your 1541 is out of alignment. C= service centers will typically align a 1541 for anywhere from \$20 to \$45. There are also 1541 alignment programs, (e.g. Free Spirit's "1541/71 Alignment System") which allow you to align a 1541 yourself. There are those who claim that this does not produce good results, but there are others who claim to have had satisfactory results with these programs. There were a couple of articles in COMPUTE Gazette and I think RUN on how to do this. The real problem is mechanical in nature and can be over come. Other products are PHYSICAL EXAM 1541 and 1571 versions.

**1571 Disk Drive:** The C=1571 drive is normally a double sided drive. However, it can also emulate a 1541 and read single sided disks. Some of the earlier 1571's had older system chips (ROMs) which caused a couple of problems. One, these older drives were typically very slow when writing to the back side of a disk. Two, it would take these drives ~30 seconds to go into single sided mode. To check your ROM version, read the error channel of the disk drive right after startup. On the 128, just PRINT DS\$. On the 64, use:

```
10 open15,8,15:input#15,a,a$,b,c:close15:printa,a$,b,c
```

Run the program; if the message says v3.0 or v3.1, you have the newer ROM. If it has a version <3.0, you probably have the older ROM.

One problem that might occur is not having the head close enough to the disk as required because of

the light tension of the spring that pulls the head down. Somewhere I remember that there was supposed to be a replacement part. However, one of the alignment programs suggesting using pennies to weight it down and lo and behold it started working.

**1581 Disk Drive:** The C=1581 drive is a 3.5" drive that uses DSDD 800K disks. It is compatible with both the C64 and C128, although some programs will not work correctly with the 1581.

A small number of 1581's were shipped with an early version of a controller chip which has problems with some software.

## 12.2. What do I do for my ill computer?

**Commodore 64:** A common problem with the C-64 is it's power supply. The C64 power supplies are not especially powerful, and have this disturbing tendency to fail. If your computer stops working, first check the power supply. Replacement power supplies can be obtained from a number of mail order places (e.g. Tenex, Parsec, Inc.). Additionally, several places advertise "heavy-duty" power supplies that come with warranties, and give the C64 enough power to run a REU.

If your power supply goes, it can sometimes take other parts of the computer with it. If your power supply has died, but the C64 continues to fail with a known working power supply, it is likely that a few of your chips got fried.

Also, another common problem with the C64 is the fuse inside the computer. If the system power on light comes on, but you get a blank screen, suspect the fuse. It is usually blown by misinsertion of devices into the computer.

**Commodore 128 and 128D:** Like the 1571, the C-128 has an older ROM and a newer ROM. The differences between the two are less serious than is the case with a 1571. The easiest way to tell the difference is to click down the CAPS LOCK key and hit Q while in BASIC direct mode. If you see a lower case q, then you have an older ROM. If you see an upper case Q, then you have a newer ROM. New ROMs can be ordered from (e.g. the Grapevine Group) for about \$25. The ROM chips in the 128 are all socketed, so replacing the chips is relatively easy.

## 12.3. What do I do for my ill keyboard?

*Clean it:*

*Materials you will need:*

Denatured (rubbing) alcohol, a clean pencil eraser, cotton swabs, a small Phillips head screwdriver, a jewellers size Phillips screwdriver and a Commodore 64 computer keyboard.

*Procedure:*

1. **FIRST AND FOREMOST.** Make certain that you have discharged any static electricity in your body by grounding yourself to something like a cold water pipe. Otherwise, you could blow chips in your computer if you were to touch the wrong things.

2. Turn off your computer and unplug any and all cords and connectors, fast-loaders, modems, etc. (just have yourself a naked (if you will excuse the expression) computer).

3. Thoroughly clean all external connectors and ports with the swabs and alcohol. Also, clean all plugs that go into those ports. If the problem you had persists, proceed with the following:

4. On a clean surface, turn your keyboard upsidedown. Remove the screws in the bottom.

5. **CAREFULLY**, separate the two halves about an inch. Unplug the connector to the "power" LED on the top of the C-64.

6. Place the two halves flat so that the keyboard is facing you. The two halves will be connected by a wire harness. This harness may be held down by tape that must be removed in order to place the unit flat.

7. Remove the 15 or so brass screws that hold the circuit board under the keyboard.

8. Turn the circuit board over. You will see the bottom of the keyboard with a rubber "U" under each key, which makes contact with the board. You will also see on the circuit board, a pair of gold contacts for each key on the C-64.

9. **CAREFULLY** wash ALL the rubber "U"'s and the gold contacts with the swabs and rubbing alcohol. Allow the alcohol to DRY.

10. Gently, clean each gold contact with the eraser. BRUSH AWAY THE ERASER CRUMBS (I use a small hand-held, battery-powered vacuum cleaner).

11. Re-clean the gold contacts with the swabs and alcohol to ensure that you have removed ALL traces of the eraser.

12. Reassemble the C-64 in the reverse order of disassembly.

+ 13.1. How can you alter which side a 1571 reads from?

On a 128, you can force the 1571 to go into single sided mode with the drive command "u0>m0". (Issue such a command with open15,8,15,"u0>m0":close15.) On the 64, a 1571 defaults to single sided mode, but you can convert it to double sided mode (and read full double sided disk in 64 mode) with the drive command "u0>m1". While in single sided mode, you can actually format both sides of the disk as separate file systems. The command "u0>h0" selects the regular side of the disk, and "u0>h1" selects the flip side of the disk. Note that the flip side, when formatted this way, cannot be read by a 1541; neither side will be readable by a 1571 when the disk is inserted upside-down.

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2+1 Cartridge Port Expander .....	\$45.00
MW-350 Printer interface w/BK Buffer .....	\$60.00
MW-350 Printer Interface (20K) .....	\$49.00
IEEE Flash! 64 IEEE Interface .....	\$90.00
Quicksilver 128 IEEE Interface .....	\$120.00
CMD's C-1351 Compatible SmartMouse .....	\$49.95
Mouse Pad .....	\$2.95
Samsung SP-2412 24-pin Epson-comp. Printer .....	\$199.00
1541-II Disk Drive (refurb, no Power Supply) .....	\$89.00
1541-II Disk Drive (refurb, w/Power Supply) .....	\$109.00
C-64, C-64C Power Supply (Repairable) .....	\$39.00
C-128 Power Supply (Repairable) .....	\$45.00
1581/1541-II Power Supply .....	\$25.00

#### Utilities

CMD Utilities .....	\$24.95
JiffyMON-64 (ML Monitor) .....	\$19.95
Big Blue Reader V4.10 (SOGWAP) .....	\$39.00
The Compression Kit (Mad Man) .....	\$39.00

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GEOS 128 v2.0 .....	\$49.00
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geoCalc 128 or geoFile 128 .....	\$45.00
geoProgrammer .....	\$45.00
geoPublish .....	\$40.00
geoChart .....	\$29.00
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FONTPACK .....	\$25.00
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BeckerBASIC .....	\$20.00
RUN GEOS Companion .....	\$20.00
RUN GEOS Power Pak I or II (Specify) .....	\$20.00
geteWay/84 or 126 (Specify Version) .....	\$29.95
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Perfect Print LQ for GEOS (Laser-like output) .....	\$49.95
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Dweezlls Greatest Hits (NewTools2, Stamp, Label128) .....	\$30.00

#### Books

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Anatomy of the 1541 .....	\$12.00
C128 Computer Aided Design .....	\$12.00
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Graphics Book for the C-64 .....	\$12.00
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#### Languages/Compilers

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BASIC 128 Compiler (Abacus) .....	\$25.00
Blitz! 64 Compiler (Skyles) .....	\$30.00
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Fortran 64 (Abacus) .....	\$17.00
Pascal 84 (Abacus) .....	\$17.00

#### RAMLink Power-Backed RAM Disk

RAMLink with 0 MB RAMCard .....	\$189.95
RAMLink with 1 MB RAMCard .....	\$229.95
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Real-Time-Clock for RAMCard (Optional) .....	\$20.00
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Parallel Cable (RAMLink to HD) .....	\$14.95

#### Games

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RUN C126 Funpak .....	\$15.00
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Data Manager 2 (Timeworks) .....	\$16.00
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BOCA 2400 Baud Modem .....	\$69.00
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BOCA 14.4K Baud Modem .....	\$189.00
BOCA 14.4K w/SwiftLink & Cable .....	\$219.00

#### Music/MIDI Software

Dr. T KCS64 & MIDI Interface .....	\$150.00
Dr. T KCS128 & MIDI Interface .....	\$189.00
Dr. T Algorithmic Composer .....	\$20.00
Dr. T 4-OP MIDI Ed/Lib .....	\$20.00
Dr. T CZ-Rider MIDI Ed/Lib .....	\$20.00
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**FD Series**

#### 3.2 and 1.6 MB 3.5" Floppy Drives

The FD-2000 and FD-4000 disk drives utilize today's latest 3.5 inch disk drive technology. FD-2000's support 800K (1581 style) and 1.6 MB (High Density) formats, while the FD-4000 also offers support for the 3.2 MB (Enhanced Density) disk format. Fast and reliable, they support 1541, 1571 and 1581 style partitions, Native Mode partitioning and can actually read and write 1581 disks. FD's feature built-in JiffyDOS, SWAP button and optional Real Time Clock. High capacity, speed and compatibility make the FD right for every application, including GEOS.



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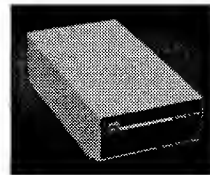
The fastest possible form of storage, RAMLink provides instant access to files and retains data while your computer is turned off. Easy to use and expandable up to 16 MB, RAMLink utilizes the same powerful operating system found in CMD Hard Drives. Unlike Commodore REU's which are compatible with less than 1% of commercial software, RAMLink supports more than 80% of the commercial titles. RAMLink also offers built-in JiffyDOS Kernel, SWAP feature, reset button, enable/disable switch, pass-thru port and RAM port for REU/GEORAM use. RAMLink offers maximum speed, expandability and compatibility with all types of software and hardware including GEOS.



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#### SCSI Hard Drive for the C-64/128

HD Series Hard Drives are available in capacities up to 1 GB, are fully partitionable, and can emulate 1541, 1571, & 1581 disks while Native partitions utilize MSDOS-style subdirectories. HD's connect easily to the serial bus or parallel via RAMLink. Includes built-in JiffyDOS, SWAP feature and RTC. HD's offer superior compatibility with most commercial software including BBS, Productivity and GEOS. And with new pricing, HD Series drives offer the lowest cost per megabyte of any C64/128 storage device.



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